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ABSTRACT

A random sample of 55 faculty and 593 students in 28 classes was surveyed to determine class scheduling preferences for three-semester-hour courses and to relate them to existing scheduling patterns at Moraine Valley Community College. Fifty-five percent of the students preferred two 90-minute class sessions per week, 27% preferred one three-hour session, and 18% preferred one-hour segments three times weekly. Faculty had similar preferences, with percentages of 64, 23, and 13, respectively. The spring 1977 college schedule indicated that 36% of the three-semester-hour classes were scheduled three times weekly, 56% twice weekly in 90-minute sessions, and 8% three hours once a week. In addition, an analysis of core requirement classes in four areas of study showed from 40% to 50% of these classes scheduled three times weekly. Though limited by a sample bias toward day, full-time students, the study suggests that revising schedules to include more classes that meet only once or twice weekly is one way to reduce attrition and attract more students. The questionnaires are appended. (RT)

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STUDENT AND FACULTY PREFERENCES FOR CLASS SCHEDULING PATTERNS

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by

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Moraine Valley Community College

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ABSTRACT

Student and faculty preferences for class scheduling patterns were studied to ascertain those preferences and relate them to the existing class scheduling patterns at Moraine Valley Community College. Failure to meet projected enrollment growth and concern over attrition are major concerns at many community colleges at the present time. A close analysis of the preferences of students and faculty identified the practice of offering courses in 90 minute segments twice a week as the most popular delivery system and the three hour block once a week as the second choice. The least desirable was the traditional one hour block, three times a week. The M.V.C.C. spring 1977 schedule shows a preference for the 90 minute segments, twice a week also but the traditional one hour block, three times a week is the second most popular. A closer analysis of the schedule also shows the one hour block courses concentrated in the group requirements that all students are required to take. This study suggests that one way to reduce attrition and attract more students might be to design a schedule more responsive to the unique needs of community college students.

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INTRODUCTION

Student and faculty preference for class scheduling patterns has become an item of concern for administrators at Moraine Valley Community College as they seek to attract new students to the campus, as well as, reduce attrition among existing students.

A. Background and Significance of the Study

During the 1976 fall semester, Moraine Valley Community College (M.V.C.C.) experienced an unexpected decline in projected enrollment. The enrollment loss, coming during the final stages of new construction, placed the college in a difficult financial position. President James D. Koeller began an institution-wide campaign to enlist the support of all faculty members in the recruitment and retention of students. A number of faculty members suggested that the answer to the retention of students might be a new approach to scheduling that would meet the unique needs of the community college student.

This is the first time in its nine year history that Moraine Valley faced a drop in projected enrollment. The loss of revenue and ultimate reductions in staff and programs are of great concern to both staff and administration. The campus wide effort to identify new means of preventing attrition and recruiting new students is a team effort that has brought the administration, faculty, and students closer together.

In an informal sampling of students, concerns regarding the traditional approach to the scheduling of classes were identified. Reasons given for their concern were:

1. Difficulty arranging for the expense of babysitters three times a week as opposed to once a week.
2. Difficulty arranging job schedules around classes that meet three times a week as opposed to once.
3. Working mother's inability to maintain home and family schedules when absent from home three nights a week.
4. Transportation problems in one car families.
5. Time and energy loss involved in three trips per week for part time students who work a forty hour week.
6. Spouse reluctance to be left alone three nights a week.
7. Gasoline shortage and increasing gasoline cost.

This study investigated student and staff preferences for class scheduling patterns, in an effort to determine if the current scheduling practice at Moraine Valley Community College produced the type of class schedule that met their needs.

The implications of this project extended themselves out into the community at large. The study dealt with student preferences in scheduling, surveyed currently enrolled students. After determining what their preferences were, the schedule, if adjusted, could be more suitable to a greater number of people, who find the old schedule impossible to adjust their lives around and thus prevent attrition.

The significance for Moraine Valley is twofold; first a sincere desire to design the community college schedule to reflect student needs and preferences and secondly to meet those needs so that attrition is diminished thus maintaining the enrollment needed for the efficient operation of the college.

B. Review of the Literature

In 1968 Gleazer defined a Community College as a "two year institution of higher education, offering instruction adopted in content, level and schedule to the needs of the community." Medsker (1966), Knoell (1966), and Moore (1971) also support this concept of the community college.

Unfortunately there is often a discrepancy between theory and practice as Gleazer (1973) discovered in a more recent study. He states that most Community Colleges have a limited knowledge of the needs of their students and tend to rely on tradition that doesn't fit community college students or institutional purposes. He pleads for nontraditional procedures to deal with the nontraditional student population.

Knoell (1966) supports Gleazer's view when she states that, "students are seldom interviewed to find out how they really feel about their past experiences and the kinds of opportunities which might be offered to them." Furthermore, she feels that the vast numbers of young people not now attending college would do so if truly new approaches to programming were investigated.

Medsker (1960) calls attention to the related problem of educational "climate" in the community college and to student discontent. He called for a major commission to be created to investigate sociological needs of students and the implications for curriculum, instruction, and service.

It appears that Medsker's (1960) plea for investigation of student needs fell on deaf ears in the "hey day" of the community college when enrollments were growing. Now that enrollments are declining, administrators and faculty are being forced into investigating new ways to recruit and retain students.

Croft and Falusi (1973) claim that an organization's success is directly proportionate to its capacity to produce and employ adaptive response mechanisms. Community colleges would do well to heed their advice.

Miami-Dade (Gleazer, 1968) discovered they could stretch the limits of institutional fensibility to accommodate the special needs of community college students, forced out of the classroom, by time and circumstance. They offered classes in three hour blocks and found that the concentration and rigors of this type of schedule served the needs of the highly motivated students of all ages and diverse walks of life.

In 1971 when staff members at Mount Vernon College in Washington, D.C. studied the relationship between the traditional academic calendar and individual learning styles, they could find no convincing reason to perpetuate the traditional lockstep system that has been imposed on generations of students. The results of their study was a switch to a nontraditional approach to scheduling. Continuous evaluations of the new system shows enrollment growth, less attrition, higher overall grade point averages and fewer students on probation (Menefee, 1971).

The Office of Institutional Research at M.V.C.C. did a study (Hecht, 1974) on the Learning Preferences of Community College Students and Potential Students. In this study, Hecht reports that three-fourths of the students and potential students preferred to learn on the college campus, by attending scheduled classes, as opposed to non-traditional types of learning. The study also shows that the students and potential students prefer to learn at their own convenience. They reported that conflicts existing between work or family responsibilities and course schedules was a major obstacle to continuing their learning.

On the other hand, studies by Scott (1976) at Bakersfield College and Smith (1975) at San Diego Community College clearly show that students and faculty are satisfied with the traditional approach to programming and scheduling. If this is also the case at Moraine, then the search must continue for an answer that is as unique as the students at Moraine Valley.

The problem of declining enrollment is new to the community college and must be met in new and different ways. According to Adams and Hoyt (1976), the institutions which meet the needs of their constituencies in unique ways, as the University of Wisconsin did (Adams and Hoyt, 1976), will be more likely to escape the drastic effects of diminishing enrollments and resources than those which continue old policies in a new era for higher education.

A study of this nature was appropriate to the Educational Research and Evaluation module and provided the researcher with an opportunity to utilize research techniques as well as to provide data necessary for institutional planning at M.V.C.C. when it was needed.

II. METHOD

A. Hypothesis

Null Hypotheses (Ho)

1. There is no significant difference between student preferences and staff preferences regarding the scheduling of time blocks for course offerings.
2. There is no significant differences between student preferences and tradition regarding the scheduling of time blocks for course offerings.
3. There is no significant difference between staff preferences and tradition regarding the scheduling of time blocks for course offerings.

Alternate Hypotheses (Ha)

1. Student's preferences regarding the scheduling of time blocks for courses is significantly different than staff preferences.
2. Student's preferences regarding the scheduling of time blocks for courses is significantly different than tradition.
3. Staff preferences regarding the scheduling of time blocks for courses is significantly different than tradition.

B. Definition of Terms

1. Class Scheduling Patterns

Class scheduling patterns refers to the practice of offering three semester hour courses in one of the following ways:

a. Three times a week in one hour segments

b. Twice a week in 90-minute segments

c. Once a week in a three hour block

2. Day Student

A student who is actively pursuing community college credit between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

3. E. C. H.

Abbreviation for "equated credit hours."

4. Evening Student

A student who is actively pursuing community college credit in courses scheduled on week nights between 5:00 p.m. and midnight.

5. Full time Student

A student who is actively pursuing twelve or more semester hours of community college credit.

6. M. V. C. C.

Moraine Valley Community College

7. Part time Student

A student who is actively pursuing at least three but not more than ten semester hours of community college credit.

8. Tradition

The practice of offering the vast majority of college courses in one hour blocks, three days a week.

9. Staff

A person employed by the college for the purpose of instruction of students in a traditional classroom lecture or lab situation.

C. Procedures for Collecting Data

The data was collected from the faculty and students attending M.V.C.C. during the 1977 spring quarter. The population was considered to be all full time faculty and all students attending M.V.C.C. Monday through Saturday, day or evening, who were enrolled in credit courses at the campus.

The full time faculty list published by the college was numbered sequentially from 1 to 119. The table of random digits (Glass and Stanley, 1970) was used to identify the 90 faculty members to be surveyed. The M.V.C.C. 1977 spring catalog of course offerings was used to identify 28 classes in which to administer the survey. Only courses granting three E.C.H. of college credit, taught on the campus, in the traditional classroom setting, were included.

The courses that met the above criteria were then numbered and the table of random digits used to identify the 28 classes. Since each class had approximately 22 students, this technique produced a large enough sample (593) out of a total student population (10,000) for valid inferences to be drawn regarding the population.

Faculty data was collected by distributing the survey to the faculty persons identified in the fandom sample, at a faculty meeting. The completed surveys were returned in the faculty mail. The researcher surveyed the students in their classes, with the instructor's permission.

The student questionnaire (Appendix A) developed for this study, asked students to identify their sex, marital status, age, employment status, and student status in addition to their class scheduling preference. The additional information was used to compare the characteristics of the sample to the

characteristics of the population. The population data was made available by the Office of Institutional Research at M.V.C.C. The additional data also proved to be very beneficial in supporting the necessity for further studies in the area of student preferences for class scheduling patterns.

The faculty questionnaire (Appendix B) asked faculty members to identify course area, type of instruction and time of instruction (day or evening) as well as their class scheduling preference. This additional information did not prove to be necessary to the study itself.

D. Procedures for Treating Data

The chi-square test was used at the .05 level of significance to test the three null hypotheses concerning student and staff preferences and tradition to class schedulings.

The Moraine Valley Community College spring 1977 schedule was evaluated to determine if it reflected those preferences. For example, if 30 percent of the students preferred classes to be offered in one hour blocks and the fall course offerings included one hour blocks 30 percent of the time (+/- 5 percent), the schedule was considered to reflect student preferences. The same procedure was used to test student preferences for 1-1/2 hour and 3-hour block classes and faculty preferences for time blocks for course offerings.

E. Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to students in a random sample of courses and a random sample of the teaching faculty at M.V.C.C. It did not include students enrolled in off-campus courses, students enrolled in non-traditional courses of study, students enrolled in non-credit courses, week end students, nor did it include students not currently enrolled but who plan to attend at some future date. Part time faculty, faculty on leave, and administrators who

teach a course were excluded from the study. The analysis of the spring M.V.C.C. schedule was limited to three credit hour courses offered in the traditional classroom setting.

The results of the study apply only to M.V.C.C. and do not predict the student preferences for class time blocks in any other community college.

The use of the questionnaire itself was a limitation since some respondents may have given what they felt to be the socially accepted answer instead of the answer that represents their personal preference.

Another limitation might have been a less than desirable response to the questionnaire because of absences or lack of interest.

F. Basic Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, tradition was assumed to represent the practice of offering college classes in one hour blocks, three days a week. Furthermore, it was assumed that the M.V.C.C. 1977 spring schedule reflects tradition. This second assumption proved to be invalid. After a thorough analysis of the M.V.C.C. schedule it became obvious that the schedule as a whole does not reflect tradition. The schedule does, however, reflect more tradition in the scheduling of the general education requirements than it does in the scheduling of vocational-technical courses (Table 4).

It will also be presumed that the sample was random and the responses of the sample reliably predicted the preferences of the total population.

III. RESULTS

This study was designed to determine whether or not there are significant differences in the preferred class scheduling pattern of students, faculty, and tradition.

The instruments used were student and faculty questionnaires (Appendix A and B) and the M.V.C.C. schedule. Tabulation of the results may be found in Table I.

TABLE I

CLASS SCHEDULING PREFERENCES

Class Scheduling Pattern	Students		Faculty		(MVCC Schedule) Tradition	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	104	18	7	13	244	36
B	326	55	35	64	404	56
C	163	27	13	23	54	8
TOTAL	593	100%	55	100%	702	100%

The data presented in Table I represents frequency data and were analyzed according to the Chi-square test. In testing the first Null Hypothesis, the results indicate a chi-square value of 1.63. Since a chi-square value of at least 5.99 at the .05 level must be obtained to be significant, the null hypothesis of no significant difference between student and faculty preferences in regards to the scheduling of time blocks for course offerings is accepted. The results of the chi-square analysis are illustrated in Table II.

In testing the second Null Hypothesis, the results indicate a chi-square value of 111,01. Since a chi-square value of at least 5.99 at the .05 level must be obtained to be significant, the second null hypothesis was rejected.

The chi-square value of 22.44 for the third hypothesis regarding the relationship between faculty and tradition was also rejected at the .05 level of significance.

TABLE II

RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS OF DATA

Groups	Chi-square Test Value	df	Chi-square Value At Significance Level	Significance Level
Student - Faculty	1.63	2	5.99	.05
Student - Tradition	111.01	2	9.21	.05
Faculty - Tradition	22.44	2	9.21	.05

A comparison of the student characteristics of the sample with the population characteristics was made in order to determine if our sample was representative of the population. Figures for the student sample were taken from the questionnaire. Questions two and four could not be compared because the M.V.C.C. Office of Institutional Research had no data available on the population with respect to these two characteristics. Table III shows this comparison.

TABLE III

COMPARISON OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENT SAMPLE WITH POPULATION

Characteristics	Sample		Population	
	No.	%	No.	%
Sex				
Male	237	40	4,917	49
Female	356	60	5,145	51
Marital Status				
Married	142	24	-	-
Single	451	76	-	-
Age				
16 - 24	445	75	5,130	51
25 - 36	112	19	3,032	30
37 - 46	30	5	954	10
47 - Up	6	1	717	7
Employment				
Not employed	267	45	-	-
20 hours or less	101	17	-	-
Full time	225	38	-	-
Student Status				
Part time	95	16	7,212	72
Full time	498	84	2,850	28
Attending				
Days	540	91	4,955	49
Nights	53	9	5,107	51

The table clearly shows that the day, full time student dominated the survey and may have biased the results. This is particularly significant since the evening, part time students make up a larger segment of the population.

A further analysis of the M.V.C.C. schedule with respect to major group requirements for all students produced a different view of the schedule with respect to time blocks for course scheduling of 3 E.C.H. courses.

TABLE IV

AN ANALYSIS OF GROUP REQUIREMENTS BY TIME BLOCKS SCHEDULED

TIME BLOCKS	Group 1 COM 101-102 COM 111-112		Group 2 Psychology Sociology Political Science		Group 3 Math		Group 4 Humanities		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	38	48	43	47	28	40	19	50	128	45
B	40	50	51	51	42	59	18	49	151	52
C	3	2	4	2	2	1	1	1	10	3
TOTAL	81	100%	98	100%	72	100%	38	100%	289	100%

Table V compares the course time block frequency for the group requirements with the time block frequency of the schedule of all the 3 E.C.H. courses.

TABLE V

A COMPARISON OF GROUP REQUIREMENTS WITH M.V.C.C. SCHEDULE OF ALL 3 E.C.H. COURSES AND STUDENT PREFERENCES

TIME BLOCKS	Group Requirements		Student Preferences		Schedule	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	128	44	104	18	244	36
B	151	52	326	55	404	56
C	10	4	163	27	54	8
TOTAL	289	100%	593	100%	702	100%

The practice of offering classes in ninety minute time blocks twice a week as represented by B in Table V is only three percent below student preference in the group requirement area and one percent above student preference in the schedule as a whole. The practice of offering classes in three hour blocks once a week as represented by C in Table V is 23 percent below student preference in the group requirement area and 19 percent below student preference in the schedule as a whole. The practice of offering classes in one hour blocks three times a week as represented by A in Table V is 26 percent higher than students prefer in the group requirement and 18 percent higher in the schedule as a whole. This obvious disparity between student preference and the M.V.C.C. schedule in depicted in Table V.

IV. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Discussion

This study has shown that students and staff prefer their courses to be offered in 90 minute blocks, twice a week. The second most popular time blocks was the three hour block that meets once a week. The M.V.C.C. fall 1977 schedule appears to reflect student and staff preferences with regard to the 90 minute time block that meets twice a week but the schedule reflects twice the number of the least desireable one hour time blocks and only a token offering of courses in three hour blocks (Table I). The problem appears to be compounded by the fact that the courses in the group requirements, which all students must take, reflect a much heavier bias toward the one hour block than the schedule as a whole (Table IV and Table V). Students with a life schedule that must incorporate an educational program into a lifestyle that includes a job (full or part time) and a family may try desparately to arrange a two day a week class schedule only to be thwarted by a course requirement that is offered three days a week in a one hour block.

Community college students who are employed, as 84 percent of the students in our survey are, value a compact schedule more than anything else. Time lost traveling back and forth to the campus for a one hour block course could be considered an inefficient use of their time. In some instances it creates a situation where a parent is away from the family three evenings a week. It is highly probably that this student's motivation would wear thin after several weeks as pressures both physical and domestic begin to build.

Full time employees also have commitments to employers. Many employers will create flexible hours for valuable employees within reason but to ask them to release an employee daily for an hour plus travel time, strains the most cooperative employers' good will.

Community college students frequently cope with transportation problems as well (Appendix C). Many of the students belong to one car families and must share its use with one or more family members. Bus transportation, when available, becomes inefficient when the bus schedule and route the bus takes arriving at the college, is excessive. A part time student (72 percent) could spend an hour on the bus for every 50 minutes of class time when classes meet in one hour time blocks. This ratio changes drastically when the course meets once a week in a three hour block.

Our survey was heavily biased in favor of the full time student, attending day classes. The part time, evening student represents the largest segment of the M.V.C.C. population (Table III) and the group most vocal about the schedule not meeting their needs.

If they had been adequately represented in the survey what would the results have shown?

B. Implications of the Study

Community colleges are no longer in an era of growth and expansion. The attitude that students will sacrifice anything to get what the college has to offer is no longer valid. The desire for self improvement or job improvement may bring the student to the campus but schedules unresponsive to their primary responsibilities to job and families can dampen their motivation or at least cause them to postpone their college courses until a later date. Are there countless others in the community that colleges have failed to attract because of the schedule?

C. Recommendations

The results of this study clearly show that full time, day students prefer courses in two or three hour blocks. As a result of this finding, it is recommended that future schedules reflect less one hour time blocks and more 90-minute and three hour time blocks particularly in the area of group requirements, during the day.

A future study of the needs of the part time, evening student is indicated because of the bias toward full time, day students in this study, who represent only 21 percent of the college population. Informal samplings or coffee clutch dialog suggestive of their needs is not the solid research needed to adjust schedules.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME _____
(optional)

DIRECTIONS: CIRCLE THE RESPONSE THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOU.

1. SEX

   A) Male
   B) Female

2. MARITAL STATUS

   A) Married
   B) Single

3. WHAT AGE GROUP DO YOU FALL INTO AS OF TODAY'S DATE?

   A) 17 - 25
   B) 25 - 35
   C) 35 - 45
   D) 45 and up

4. EMPLOYMENT STATUS

   A) Not employed
   B) Employed less than 20 hours per week
   C) Employed 20 or more hours per week

5. STUDENT STATUS

   A) Part time (less than 12 credit hours)
   B) Full time (more than 12 credit hours)

6. WHEN DO YOU ATTEND MOST OF YOUR CLASSES?

   A) Days (before 5 p.m.)
   B) Nights (after 5 p.m.)

7. HOW OFTEN DO YOU PREFER TO ATTEND CLASS WHEN TAKING A THREE CREDIT HOUR COURSE?

   A) Once a week for three hours
   B) Approximately 1-1/2 hours twice a week
   C) One hour three times a week

BOBBIE NOONAN
CHILD CARE COORDINATOR

APPENDIX B

INSTRUCTOR'S QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME _____

1. WHEN DO YOU CURRENTLY TEACH MOST OF YOUR CLASSES?

   A) Days (before 5 p.m.)
   B) Nights (after 5 p.m.)

2. WHEN TEACHING A THREE HOUR CREDIT COURSE WHICH CLASS TIME BLOCK DO YOU PREFER?

   A) One hour, three times a week
   B) 75 minutes, twice a week
   C) Three hour block once a week

3. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES MOST OF YOUR COURSES?

   A) Lab-hands on experience
   B) Lecture-theory-discussion

4. WHAT COURSE AREA DO YOU TEACH IN MOST OF THE TIME?

   A) Business
   B) Biological Sciences
   C) Physical Sciences
   D) Social Sciences
   E) Communications and Literature
   F) Foreign Languages
   G) Humanities
   H) Mathematics
   I) Physical Education
   J) Health Sciences
   K) Industrial Technology

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